

Seager, David R. Growth of Baptists in America

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Library

6633 W. WARTBURG CIRCLE
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092

"GROWTH OF BAPTISTS IN AMERICA."

(A Mini-Paper)

Presented to:
The Metro North Pastors' Conference
Salem Ev. Lutheran Church
6814 N. 107th Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Prepared by:
David R. Seager
January 16, 1984

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Library

6633 W. WARTBURG CIRCLE
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092

ERIC 704

"GROWTH OF BAPTISTS IN AMERICA"

INTRODUCTION

Thumb screws, the "rack", bamboo shoots under the finger nails, and a mini-essay on the Baptist movement - all carry the same impact and message to the writer. It was extremely difficult to digest all that the Baptists are and stand for, and then to re-develop it into a mini-essay which would become understandable to all. If, in the course of this paper, you find things to be confusing and unorganized, such exists, not so much because this is indicative of the writer, but because it is almost impossible to reach a definitive point about the Baptists. Depending on whom you read or what branch of the Baptist movement you research, the theological tenets and positions will change, a sort of religious aurora borealis.

Little has been done in our circles to make us aware of the Baptists. Yet the 13.9 million Southern Baptists make up the largest Protestant denomination in America. We monthly if not more regularly hear or read about Billy Graham or Jerry Falwell. Many of the religious talk shows and religious broadcasts are Baptist in background. If memory serves me correctly, even Elmbrook Community Church has such a fermentation. The Baptists are around us, but we tend to ignore them.

Such would not be the case if you crossed the Mason-Dixon line and were called to serve in the Bible-belt of the South. One of the biggest complaints from our brethren to the south is that they are always up against the "Baptists." Sticking our heads in the sandy oasis of our studies will not make them disappear! Therefore, I welcome this opportunity to present to you this mini-essay: "Growth of Baptists in America." It is indeed a timely study which I hope will benefit you in your knowledge of this denomination and, at the same time, lead you to appreciate the theological stand we have.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE BAPTISTS

To know the growth of an organization first of all requires that we determine from where the organization has come, its origin. Three theories are advanced concerning the historic origin of the Baptists. The first, not generally held by many, is that the Baptist principles had their beginning in the work of John the Baptist, Christ's public ministry, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This theory is supported by those who wish to give the Baptists a rich, historical heritage comparable to that of the Roman church. There have been various thoughts or theories of succession by which a chain of authority from Christ to the present can

2714
707

be ascertained. Listed are four: 1) apostolic succession, by which is meant a chain of ordination; 2) baptismal succession, a chain of baptism by those properly baptized; 3) church succession, a chain of local churches bearing the true marks of the church; 4) a succession of principles which are evident in individuals or groups who have held essentially the Baptist witness and faith down through time.

The second theory is that modern Baptists owe their origin to the Swiss and German Anabaptist movement. (Anabaptists = Ana meaning again, and baptizo meaning I baptize. This was a name given to those who rejected infant baptism and rebaptized such as join their communion, maintaining that this Sacrament is not valid unless administered by immersion and to persons who are able to give an account of their faith. Baptism is thus for believers only!) However, too many of the errors of the anabaptists were rejected by the Baptists and thus, historians feel, was not the sole basis for the Baptist movement. Nevertheless, the Anabaptist movement had a direct bearing on the Baptists and was a direct source for their particular stand.

The third theory and the one most widely accepted is that the origin of the Baptists is found in 17th-century England, where they emerged from the Congregationalist movement. They tie the Baptist to the English Reformation of the 16th century. The Church of England instituted its own reforms out of a combination of religious and political motives, and the religious settlement reached under Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was a compromise between its own early heritage, Roman Catholic tradition, and the influence of the Protestant reformers. But many felt that these reforms had not gone far enough. Such who were dissatisfied were called the "Puritans." This movement began as a protest movement against certain religious ceremonies in the established church, the use of the Book of Common Prayer, and the wearings of special ministerial garments at the observance of the Lord's Supper. Before long, some Puritans asked that the form of government for the Church of England be presbyterial instead of episcopal.

But again there were those who would not have either. Robert Browne, around 1580, advocated a congregational plan. He objected to the "parish church," where everyone in the community was required by law to be a member of the church, and to have his children baptized. Instead, he favored "gathered churches" in which membership would be limited to persons who could give evidence of conversion. The Congregationalist - as those who advocated this view were called - held that visible churches should be made up of visible saints. Although such church members could have their infants baptized, these children did not become full church members unless they later could testify to a conversion experience.

Besides setting bounds to church membership, Congregationalists also stressed the importance of the local church. Each congregation, they maintained, has authority from Christ to determine its own affairs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Having "church power," it can call its own minister, admit and exclude members, and administer discipline among its own membership. A congregation of committed and disciplined persons, they believed, was a better instrument for determining the will of God for their lives than was either a bishop or a presbytery.

In many ways, then, Congregationalists moved toward what was later to become a Baptist position. There was, however, an apparent inconsistency in the Congregationalist theory of the church. For, while they insisted upon "gathered churches" and admitted only those who had personally been converted by God's grace, they also baptized infant children of church members. The practice of infant baptism was in contradiction to their idea of visible churches made up of visible saints.

It was not long before some Congregationalist ministers began to question the propriety of baptizing infants at all. Not only could they find no basis for such a practice in the New Testament, or so they contended, but it was contrary to their conception of church membership. Consequently, some rejected infant baptism and, by taking that step, became what they later were to be called, Baptists.

This was only the beginning. We can trace the Congregationalist influence even further. Under more pressure from the civil government to conform to the Church of England, numerous dissenters fled from England. Among them was a congregation of which John Smyth was pastor. When he became convinced that infant baptism was unscriptural, he persuaded his flock to disband and to reorganize their church on the basis of believers' baptism. Having no one to turn to for this new baptism, Smyth baptized himself and then others of the congregation.

Not long after the new church had been established in 1609, John Smyth learned of the Dutch Mennonites who already practiced believers' baptism. Being a man who liked to do all things in an orderly way, Smyth began to wonder whether he had not been wrong in baptizing himself. Soon he approached the Mennonites, requesting them to baptize him again and asking to become affiliated with them. Some of the church members, however, objected to another baptism and refused to join Smyth in his attempt to merge with the Mennonites. Separating themselves from their pastor and others in the church, ten or eleven members, led by Thomas Helwys, returned to England in 1612 to become the first Baptist church in England. Before long there were a few other Baptist churches associated with this group led by Helwys, and they became known as the General Baptists. It was this group, perhaps, which was the most influenced by the anabaptists. GENERAL (Arminian) BAPTISTS were those who believed

in universal atonement and salvation and the freedom of human will. The Arminian theology emphasized the importance of human decision in the process of conversion and salvation. They held that Christ's atonement had been sufficient to cover the sins of all men, and that therefore, any man was free to accept or refuse God's offer of salvation. The atonement was therefore considered to be "general."

Around 1633, a second instance occurred of a Baptist church emerging out of a Congregationalist church. Several persons withdrew from a London church to organize a new congregation based upon believers' baptism. Before long, other congregations came into being and joined themselves to this particular church, and together they came to be known as Particular Baptists. PARTICULAR BAPTISTS emphasize the decrees by which God predestined men to be saved or lost. The work of Christ, they asserted, covered only those whom God "elected" to be saved, and it was therefore only for "particular" men. Eventually, this group represented the mainstream of Baptist life. Calvin's theology definitely was the influence on the Particular Baptists and thus, this brand of Baptists is referred to as Calvinistic Baptists. The General and Particular Baptists of England were united in 1891, the General Baptists accepting the Particular Baptists theological stand. The basis for growth in the Baptist church in the Colonies came from these movements in England.

The third case of an independent Baptist church beginning from a Congregationalist background took place in America, in Rhode Island, about 1638. In this instance, the leading spirit was Roger Williams. In 1631 he was compelled to migrate to America where he became assistant pastor at Plymouth and two years later pastor at Salem. Stressing the right of the individual, especially of complete religious toleration and liberty, he brought himself into conflict with the New England ecclesiastical and civil authorities. To appreciate that, we must remember that the early Colonists regarded themselves as a people especially chosen by God to erect a model Christian community. In England they had had no say: either to build the church they wanted or a society they considered ideal. But in the new land, however, they expected freedom to establish a state which based all laws upon the Bible, and in which only church members could vote. Such a community involved close cooperation between ministers and civil magistrates.

So, anyone who insisted that religious matters were not the business of the civil government was in trouble. Such was the case with Williams. He declared that church membership, attendance at church services, and men's private beliefs were beyond the jurisdiction of law. As a strict Predestinarian, he argued that God had already chosen whom he was going to save, and to force religious ideas and practices upon

people interfered with God's work. Such efforts could only make hypocrites, not Christians. He advocated complete "soul liberty" and full religious freedom. In 1635 Williams was expelled from Salem colony, and with five families founded Providence, R. I., whose charter guaranteed complete liberty of conscience. In 1639 rebaptism was introduced; not only^{by} Williams, but also by John Clarke in Newport, R. I. The two colonies eventually united and they procured a charter in which civil and religious liberty was fully provided. Thus, we have here the humble beginnings of the Baptist church in America. It should also be noted that this early American Baptist movement was Calvinistic in character, and as such, belong to the Particular Baptist movement.

II. THE GROWTH OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN AMERICA

For a century after Roger Williams and John Clarke had established the Baptist witness in America, Baptist progress was very slow. There was a reason for that. The Baptists in America, like those in Great Britain, were not aggressive in evangelistic outreach. Much of the increase which they did experience was caused by immigration from England. By 1740 there were only about fifty Baptist churches in the thirteen colonies, and they probably averaged not more than fifty members each.

New England, as well might be expected, had about two-thirds of the existing Baptist churches in 1740. Most of these churches were the General Baptist type, which had united into an association in 1670. There were also a few Seventh Day Baptists and a few Particular Baptists. The South had no more than about seven Baptist churches at this time.

The area of the country which catches our attention was the Middle Colonies. The Baptists here were Particular Baptists, who formed their first association in 1707, calling it the Philadelphia Baptist Association. This association was responsible for establishing patterns of church life and thought which were to have great influence upon the subsequent development of Baptists. Their practices revealed their interpretation of the doctrine of the church. Members were admitted only after a public confession of faith, baptism, and acknowledgement of covenant obligations. Instruction in the catechism, didactic sermons, and Christian literature were used to aid people in understanding their faith. The closeknit fellowship and emphasis upon a biblical theology nourished a sturdy piety and produced men and women of conviction and character men and women ready to share that conviction as the new frontier opened following the close of 18th century.

Small and scattered, these churches valued fellowship with each other. Through the Philadelphia Association they found mutual encouragement. The association provided ministers for destitute churches, encouraged young men to consider the ministry, interceded in strife-torn churches, settled disputed questions of faith and published Christian literature. It also sought to maintain doctrinal uniformity among the churches, adopting and publishing a Confession of Faith to that end. Thus, the churches carried on their common tasks through the association and, by means of it, expressed their belief in the interdependence of local churches. To be found stressed from the very beginning was the concept of the "autonomy of the local church."

The year 1740 marked a turning point in Baptist history because it was the eve of the Great Awakening in New England. Revivals were now the name of the game. At first Baptists remained aloof from revivals. There was a reason for such, a reason for their small growth, a reason for their inability to evangelize at the beginning of their growth. The Particular Baptists, especially, objected to making outright appeals to sinners to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. It was their conviction that God had already decreed whom He would save, and that He was able to see to it that these elect became converted. Their only business, these Baptists believed, was to hold their regular services of worship, and God would use that to bring his chosen into the fold. To urge men to repent, they said, might mislead those who did not belong to the elect to have a false hope of salvation.

It was the South which really benefited the most as a result of the revivalistic movement. There were only a few Baptist churches in Virginia and the Carolinas in 1740. But due to the revivalistic emphasis, the Revolutionary War, and an awareness to reach others with the Gospel, Baptist expansion had noted a deep foothold on the South, so that by 1800 there were thousands of Baptists scattered in all the southern states.

The 1800s also brought noticeable changes in the whole Baptist movement. New evangelism and missionary interests were awakened, caused to a great extent by what was happening in the Baptist church in England (William Carey to India). There was a new awakening to the fact that Christ's Kingdom was soon to come, and thus, Christians were urged to do their share to spread the gospel through their own efforts and gifts, in order to pave the way for the establishment of that kingdom. From here on in, the Baptist movement was geared in that direction, and all-out-effort was given to evangelize wherever possible.

It was also during this time that Baptists became aware of other responsibilities and activities. They formed local and state societies for home missions. A national foreign missionary society was organized in 1814, and the American Baptist Publication Society began in 1824. In 1832 they founded the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and five years later the American and Foreign Bible Society. State conventions were begun in 1821, and most of these took the form of voluntary societies. Sunday School societies were also constituted on association and state levels, while almost every state had an education society to encourage ministerial education and to promote academies and colleges.

It would be impossible to trace the continued growth of the Baptist movement from this time on in this mini-essay. Let it simply suffice to say that through the evangelism effort and the revivalistic nature of that period, with a deep commitment to reach the settlers on the frontier, the Baptist movement literally mushroomed. Thus, to help you understand the growth of the Baptist movement from here on, it is necessary to acquaint you with the individual associations, societies, and conventions of the Baptists and what they stood for. Even with this we have a problem. Depending upon the source there can be as few as 27 different groups of Baptists or as high as 34. Another problem in working with this is determining Baptist statistics - they are not always complete because they are sometimes given in such a way as "to avoid disclosing the statistics of any individual church." Altogether there are about 31 million Baptists in America. How can such diversity among Baptist be explained?

It must be remembered that Baptists are, in principle, opposed to all ecclesiastical organizations. That has been pointed out by their stand on "the right of the individual and the autonomy of the local church." While the majority of Baptist congregations are loosely banded together in national conventions, many go no farther than to practice fellowship in local associations, without any formal organization. Some even limit the fellowship to a mere exchange of the minutes of their local meetings. For this reason it is rather difficult to classify and to describe the various Baptist bodies. It must further be kept in mind that the missionary, educational, and publication programs are not carried on by the convention or association as such, but rather by societies organized for this purpose. These societies are usually made up of individual Baptists from various conventions and associations, without delegated authority from their local congregation or the respective association. Support for their missionary endeavors is done on a local level, each missionary pleading his cause or the cause of his society, and the independent congregation deciding which one should get their support.

Let us now look at these various Baptist groups or associations, and by looking at them, discover more about the Baptists and what they stand for. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Baptist movement can be divided into two camps; the Particular Baptists and the General Baptists. We wish to look first at the Particular Baptists as they divide into separate areas or associations.

THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CONVENTION: During the first two centuries of their American history the Baptists of the Northern States showed little growth, largely because of their "separatistic" principle. Following the Revolutionary War, this changed. They desired to raise the standards of ministerial training and so they established the Baptist Education Society of 1812. Shortly thereafter, there was a concerted Baptist effort in foreign mission work which caused them to establish the General Missions Convention for Foreign Mission Work. The challenge of the newly opened Western frontier and the need of ministering to Baptists on this new frontier resulted in the formation of the Home Missions Society in 1832. However, in 1844 the Baptists of the Northern and Southern States split over the question of raising and distributing missionary funds. Many Southern Baptists thought any organizational and denominational effort to raise funds was anti-Scriptural because it was not expressly commanded in the New Testament. Hence the Northern Baptists are often spoken of as missionary Baptists, whereas many among the Southern Baptists were known as anti-mission Baptists.

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN THE U.S.A. This was formerly the Northern Convention which was organized in 1907. It was organized as a corporation, a rather significant departure from the historic position of most Baptists. As such it is now so organized that duly elected delegates through interlocking boards conduct the various activities formerly conducted by the various societies. Furthermore, the American Baptist differ from many Baptist groups because it takes an active part in ecumenical movements and belongs to the NCC. It is also one branch which has been hard hit by the influence of liberal theologians. (1,500,000 members)

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION. (14,000,000) By far the largest and most influential of the Baptist churches. It separated from the Northern Convention due to the slavery question, more specifically the Northern Baptist's declaration that they would not appoint a slaveholder as a missionary. Others believe that an organized method of raising funds for missions also played a role in the separation. At the time for the separation the anti-missionary spirit was quite strong. Today, the Southern Baptist has reversed that spirit and must be classified as missionary Baptist.

THE CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (300,000) was organized in 1947. They regard the Bible as the inspired Word of God and hence infallible and of supreme authority. They stress the freedom and autonomy of the local congregation. Really, it was effort to return to what the Baptist movement was originally.

THE NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTIONS: (Incorporated, 5,500,000; unincorporated, 2,700,000) Immediately after the Civil War the various Baptist mission societies entered upon such an active mission program among the emancipated slaves that within three decades about one million were gathered into Baptist churches. These Negro Baptists organized the two National Baptist Conventions, differentiated by the fact that one uses the suffix "Incorporated" after the name. In doctrine and polity they are theoretically in full harmony with the American and Southern Convention. Basically, they are "black" Baptist churches.

THE BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE (103,000) functioning since 1879 is composed of Swedish Baptist immigrants and their descendants.

NATIONAL BAPTIST EVANGELICAL LIFE AND SOUL SAVING ASSEMBLY OF THE USA (58,000) Organized by A. A. Banks, Sr., it is charitable, educational, and evangelical in body. Located in the Mid West.

PRIMITIVE BAPTISTS (1,500,000) At the beginning of the 19th century the majority of Baptists in the South held that all church practices not specifically commanded in the New Testament are contrary to the Scriptures. Therefore, they were opposed to the establishment of Sunday Schools, the formal training of pastors, and the remuneration of pastors for missionary work. These Baptists were nicknamed "Hard-shell" Baptists. In particular they directed their opposition against the forming of any society for foreign or home mission work, not because they were opposed to mission work, but because they could not find any directive in the New Testament for such societies. Hence they are commonly known as Antimission Baptists, and they are, to this day, still antimission. Baptists rightly consider the "antimission movement" the saddest chapter in their history. The Primitive Baptists are extremely Calvinistic in theology and rigidly separatistic in polity. Fellowship between the various churches and local associations is maintained only by the exchanging of the minutes. Any association of church deviating from Baptist principles is dropped from fellowship. The National Primitive Baptist Convention of the USA is a Negro body.

TWO-SEED-IN-THE-SPIRIT-PREDESTINARIAN BAPTIST This group does grab ones interest, especially the name. It was established because of its Manichean error that all mankind falls into two classes. One class is endowed with a good spiritual seed, implanted by God

into Adam. All descendants who have this implanted seed in their spirit constitute a "spiritual generation existing in Christ before the creation " and are gathered into the church, which is the resurrected body of Christ. These are saved by "grace" - they had nothing to do with the implanting of the spiritual seed - and are absolutely sure of their salvation. Satan implanted an evil seed in the "spirit of the rest of mankind. These are irrevocably doomed to damnation.

AMERICAN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION (800,000) This group maintains their contention that Baptists have an unbroken history since the time of Christ and represent the only true Christian church. Refusing to admit that churches which practiced infant baptism were truly churches of Christ, they also denied that non-Baptist ministers were true gospel preachers.

These Baptists were also known as "Landmarkist" Baptists. Among the points emphasized by them was a refusal to accept "alien immersion," that is, any baptism not administered by a genuine Baptist, even though such baptism might have been by immersion. Pulpit exchange with non-Baptists was strictly forbidden, because other preachers were not truly gospel ministers. "Closed communion" was adhered to strictly, and for the Landmarkists that meant restricting communion to those who were members of the local church where the Lord's Supper was being administered. They also carried the idea of local independence to an extreme degree, maintaining that in the New Testament there is no reference to any other form of the church. They were called Landmarkists because they were perpetuating the "landmark" of the apostolic succession, namely, believers' baptism.

SEVENTH DAY BAPTISTS They are in full agreement with the principles of the Calvinistic Baptists except for their view that Saturday and not Sunday must be observed as the Sabbath, because Christ and His apostles observed the Old Testament Sabbath.

GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF REGULAR BAPTIST (210,000) Left the Northern Baptists in 1932. In theology they follow the New Hampshire Confession (1832) with strong premillennial leanings; in polity they are extremely congregational.

Now we wish to look at the other branch of the Baptist movement. Even though it was stronger in the beginning, ^{the} General Baptist movement gave way to the Particular Baptists. Here are some groups that belong to the General Baptist movement.

THE NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE (65,000) Found also in the Mid-West. It is ^a conservative, evangelis

GENERAL BAPTISTS This is a name of a small group of Baptist churches who adhere to the idea that man has a free will either to choose or not choose to believe. Prevalent is the idea of open communion and foot washing.

THE CHRISTIAN UNITY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION This is a very small group in which there is and continues to be much dissension regarding open communion.

REGULAR BAPTISTS Under this heading a number of associations are included who claim the honor of representing the original English Baptists before the distinction between Particular and General became an issue. They have (of) confessions, and Arminian as well as Calvinistic views are prevalent. There is no church organization though there are more than 20 associations. They observe close communion, generally practice foot washing, and advocate the principles which underlie perfectionism.

BAPTIST MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (187,000) is strong chiefly in Arkansas, Texas, and Mississippi. Its theology is evangelical, fundamental, missionary, predominantly premillennial.

THE FREE WILL BAPTISTS (200,000) A number of Baptist groups are represented under this heading who have in common their opposition to Calvinistic doctrine. They are Arminian Baptists who did not unite with the Northern Baptist Convention in 1911. Found in the South and the Mid-West.

THE UNITED FREE WILL NEGRO BAPTIST CHURCH This group of Negro Baptist churches is similar in theology to the previous body.

EVANGELICAL BAPTIST CHURCH, INCORPORATED is composed of Free Will Baptists in North Carolina.

UNITED BAPTISTS (63,000) A body which practices a union between Particular and General Baptist principles.

THE SEPARATE BAPTISTS IN CHRIST This body practices complete "separatistic" policies in regard to church fellowship. Once again the autonomy of the local church is stressed.

DUCK RIVER (and some six kindred) ASSOCIATIONS These associations are found chiefly in the hill country of Alabama and Tennessee. They are related to the Separate, Regular and United Baptist. They object to the paying of a stated salary to pastors and the publication of statistics. Fellowship among associations is by letter only.

THE GENERAL SIX-PRINCIPLE BAPTISTS were organized in Rhode Island in 1653. Their distinctive doctrine is the view that according to Hebrews 6:1-2 "six principles," especially the laying on of hands, are essential to church membership.

THE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCH OF AMERICA is of Swedish origin and in theology similar to the preceding group.

If I have failed to mention a Baptist organization, I apologize. The reasons, of course, why there are so many and varied Baptist groups in the United States today are found rooted in geographical, linguistic, racial, ethnic, sectional, and theological differences. The variety is so great that one sometimes wonders whether there is a common denominator which warrants the common name. In some cases, differences are so great and attitudes so antagonistic that the common name has no real significance. The majority of Baptists, however, do share a common character despite their many differences. That common character is found in their belief of a believer's religious experience and the subsequent baptism into membership by immersion.

Before I close this section of my paper I do wish to point out the amount of mission work all these groups of Baptists do. This information was found in the 1968 issue of The Baptist World. At that time they had 265 fields of work, 6,556 missionaries, 28,519 national workers, 117,495 mission churches, and 375 hospitals and clinics. The church membership from those mission churches totaled 2,073,161. Certainly, these statistics are outdated, but they do go to firm up how evangelistic the Baptists are and how committed to mission work they have become.

III. THE DOCTRINES OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH

Up to this point I have alluded to most of what the Baptists believe. Perhaps I can become a bit more definitive at this point. On many points of doctrine, Baptists agree with other evangelical bodies. While their churches are now harassed by Liberalism, Rationalism, and Higher Criticism, the denomination has always held in a general way, to the plain teachings of the Word of God. The Bible is the foundation of their belief - along with the divinity of Christ, the immortality of the soul, man's need for redemption from sin, and the absolute separation of church and state. What makes it difficult to put the finger on is the fact that Baptists have consistently refused to be bound by any man-made creeds. They have, of course, from time to time

formulated standards or confessions to indicate the general principles underlying their theology. (The Baptist creed is articulated in two "confessions". The older Philadelphia Confession, written in 1742, is referred to as "Calvin istic" - emphasis on the predestinarian teaching. The second "confession" written in New Hampshire in 1832 is more liberal in doctrine.) But they consider it contrary to their basic tenet of Christ's sovereign lordship to demand subscription to any man-made creed. Nevertheless, they do have a fixed theological principle that determines the doctrines and practices which they have. This basic principle is like a gem with two facets.

The first facet is the doctrine of the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ, who has revealed His will in the Bible. Baptists consider the Bible as "the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions must be tried." Baptists always have been, and, for the most part, remain strong advocates of "verbal inspiration", and the complete inerrancy of the Bible, and therefore also of the absolute authority of all its injunctions. It's unfortunate that, with such a commitment to the Scriptures, they practice such poor Biblical interpretation and exegesis. Higher Criticism has also eroded their position on the inerrancy of the Bible during the last 15 years. Now many of the institutions of higher learning and Bible study teach that the book of Jonah was not necessarily literal history, and that Job was perhaps a dramatic presentation of the problem of evil.

The second facet of their basic belief is the complete sovereignty and full competence of the soul under God in all religious matters. For Baptists, "the crown of humanity is the right of private judgment." This means that it is every Christian's privilege and duty to determine what is right or wrong for and by himself from the Bible alone, without benefit of sacraments, clergy, creeds, and the like. As stressed again and again throughout this paper, the chief characteristic of the Baptist is the autonomy of the local church, which gets its purpose or direction from this basic tenet.

Maintaining with other evangelical bodies the great truths of sin and atonement, they hold:

- 1) That the churches are independent in their local affairs (the autonomy of the local church).
- 2) That religious liberty, or freedom in matters of religion, is an inherent right of the human soul.

EFV 704

- 3) That a church is a body of regenerated people who have been baptized on profession of personal faith in Christ and have associated themselves in the fellowship of the Gospel. It is in connection with this that we speak of the "Christian Experience". The Christian experience is just another way of expressing the Baptist's idea of conversion. There are three considerations necessary for this experience. First of all, there is the realization that a change in the relationship of the natural man with God is needed. Secondly, there is the belief that such a change is possible. Thirdly, such a change must be vital, that is, "ye must be born again." The Baptists use an illustration to express what takes place with their idea of the "religious experience." In a testimony meeting in a rural Baptist church an elderly woman put it this way:

"I ain't what I ought to be. I ain't what I'm goin' to be be someday. But, praise the Lord! I ain't what I used to be!"

The religious experience is the new life of moral decision, growth, and hope which comes from dedicating one's life to Christ. When such a commitment is made, then membership is offered and the person is received by the Baptism of immersion. Thus, baptism is the result of coming to faith, rather than the means by which a person is brought to faith. Subsequently, much of the Baptist's worship is consumed with "testimony", time given whereby each individual feels free to speak about his religious conversion or experience

- 4) That infant baptism is not only not taught in the Scriptures, but is fatal to the spirituality of the church.
- 5) That the meaning of the word, the symbolism of the ordinance, and the practice of the early church church immersion is the only proper mode of baptism (eis & ek).
- 6) That the Scriptural officers of a church are pastors and deacons.
- 7) That the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the church observed in commemoration of the suffering and death of Christ.
- 8) That the two Sacraments are not "Means of Grace," but rather considered ordinances (by ordinance, they stress the character of these rites performed by the church in obedience to Christ's command; they are "ordained" by Him for the church's observance) used by the church to remind them of Christ and what He did on the cross. Being Calvinistic in theology, they believe in the

immediacy of the Spirit's operation (the Holy Spirit does not need a medium through which to work.) The closest thing to a Sacrament among the Baptist is prayer. Perhaps a look at David Valleskey's remark in the summer issue of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly will help us digest this supposition:

"The Calvinistic Confessions leave room for the notion, quite prevalent today, that prayer is a means of grace. In the Westminster Confession (XIV,1) we are told, 'The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the Sacraments and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.' Note that the Sacraments and prayer are put on the same level, both serving to increase and strengthen faith. This is an error that can so easily creep into our own thinking. We need to remember that prayer is a *fruit* of faith, not a *way* to faith."

9) They believe in the "security of the believer," that being "once saved, always saved."

10) They believe in a deep commitment to evangelize. This was not always the case! Due to their Calvinistic background, the early Baptist held to the extreme view of predestination. That view was expressed in the following statement:

"God hath decreed in himself from all eternity . . . all things whatsoever come to pass . . . By decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ . . . ; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation to the praise of his glorious justice. It was further stated that nothing that a man does can affect those eternal decrees. All who are predestined to be saved cannot help but respond in faith and repentance, but those not so chosen can do nothing to change their destiny."

It is in light of this tenacious adherence to this doctrine that one can understand the great difficulty Baptists had in becoming missionary and evangelistic. In the 18th century, many refused to urge anyone to repent and have faith in Christ. They were afraid that they might mislead someone into a false hope that he might be saved. Those whom God had predestined would respond without any urging by men.

"When William Carey once proposed to a ministers' conference that they discuss the question as to whether the Great Commission was still binding, an older minister retorted: 'Sit down, young man. When God wants to convert the heathen, He will do it without your help or mine.'"

11) They believe in the personal return of Christ to the Mount of Olives.

12) They believe in the millenium. (Tribulation and the rapture.)

13) Applicants for the ministry are licensed to preach by the church in which they hold membership, the right to license and to ordain being held by the individual church. Previous to ordination there is always an examination of the candidate on matters of religious experience, call to the ministry, and views on Scriptural doctrine.

14) Among many Baptists there is now a deep concern and effort for social ills and problems. The thought was that you cannot teach and preach the Gospel without giving an example of what that Gospel does. Therefore, the Baptist Church, in order to feel relevant to the times, has emphasized and taken stand for social justice and righteousness. As one put it:

"Christ's purpose was to establish an ideal social order upon the earth as well as to save the individual is plain upon every page of the gospel." And again, "it is necessary for Baptists to learn anew that witness by words cannot be divorced from witness by love and service."

It must be remembered that civil rights has been a major issue among the Baptists, for many leaders in that movement have been strong Baptists (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and others.) This also gives us some understanding behind Jerry Falwell and The Moral Majority.

15) A further discussion on infant baptism is necessary at this point. Baptists do not, as is sometimes assumed, reject infant baptism on the grounds the children are innocent and free from original sin. Rather they teach that Baptism is only a symbolic act, which signifies that through Christ the believe is now in vital connection with the Father, and that he has accepted Christ's commandments as the Law of his life. Hence only such may be baptized as have professed repentance toward God, faith in, and obedience to the Lord Jesus. Obviously, say the Baptists, an infant is incapable of such profession. To baptize an infant and then to pledge him without his will and consent, to assume the obligations symbolized in baptism, is contrary to the principle of the soul's inherent sovereign right to determine for itself whether or not to accept the supreme lordship of Christ. Seeing the need for the child, many Baptist consecrate or dedicate the child to the Lord, and when he has reached the age of reason, will call for his personal decision to faith, at which time he is publicly received into the congregation by baptism through immersion. (age of accountability.) What about the soul of a child who is not baptized? What if he or she should die? To best answer that I quote the explanation given in "The Baptist Way of Life":

"But," some will say, "do you then leave unattended those who die in

infancy, before they can reach the age of responsible personal faith? Would a merciful God allow those to be lost through no fault of their own, with no opportunity to exercise saving faith?" No, Baptists do not say this. There are some Baptists, as there are some in other denominations, who are extreme predestinarians, even to the point of fatalism. These believe that by eternal and unchangeable decrees God has willed that some should be saved and others lost, and any human efforts are unavailing to change one's prospects. But Baptists in general do not subscribe to this view. Neither do we hold that man is condemned for the stain of an inherited sin, nor that baptism is designed to wash away such a stain. On the other hand, we do believe that God's mercy, which is extended to us without any merit on our part, is equally rich and sufficient for those who have no power of choice or opportunity for faith.

Translated, this means that all children (SBC), until they reach the age of accountability, are eternally "safe", that is, all children, if and when they die, will go directly to heaven! "So dictates the mercy of God!"

- 15) Finally, you will also find the Baptist Church ^{is} guilty of practicing "synergism" in regard to conversion. From the materials I researched they teach three cooperating causes: 1) God's Word, 2) the Holy Ghost, 3) man's will not resisting the Word of God and making the decision to accept Jesus into one's life. They teach that when a person reaches an age of accountability, that person "invites Christ into his heart to be his personal Savior." We often hear that expressed when we hear a good Baptist talk about his "decision for Christ," or his "commitment" to the Savior. The individual is directly responsible for accepting Christ as his Savior! Since the Holy Spirit works immediately (without means), they suggest that conversion takes place through prayer. Thus prayer becomes the *means* by which Christ becomes my Savior. Listen to the prayer that Billy Graham suggests:

"O God, I acknowledge that I have sinned against you. I am sorry for my sins. I am willing to turn from my sins. I openly receive and acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Savior. I confess him as Lord. From this moment on I want to live for him and serve him. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Graham goes on to say,

"If you are willing to make this decision and have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you have become a child of God in whom Jesus Christ dwells."

CONCLUSION

This paper was to be a mini-essay. Already the length betrays that title and it is necessary to come to a close. It is my hope that, through this befuddled mess, some light as to what the Baptists are and what they stand for infiltrates your cranium. More and more, they are found all around us. They are to be admired for their witness to Christ, their personal programs of evangelism, their active concern for world mission programs, and their ability to talk their faith no matter what the circumstance. However, it is virtually impossible to convince them of their errors from the Scriptures, simply because they have a great inability to let the Scriptures speak for themselves. Anyone who has ever communicated with a Baptist knows how frustrating and difficult it is to discuss Bible teachings, simply because they make a passage say everything but what it is intended to say, and, at the same time, imply something that the passage does not intend to imply. Their "proof" passages to establish their positions are often weak and irrelevant! Irritating to all of us is that damnable teaching which involves work righteousness, namely, the ability to accept Christ into one's life. I have always felt that this group espouses more work righteousness in their theology than the Roman Church which they so vehemently condemn because of that very philosophy and theology. Statements have been made that the Baptist and the Lutheran positions are not that far apart. Those who make such bold statements know not of what they speak, and it is my prayer that Lutherans who love their Savior and hold to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture might never find themselves accepting Baptist theology. I always shudder when I hear about our "brethren" who attend Baptist Bible Institutes and Training Centers for Evangelism. To expose oneself to their errors is to invite disaster in regard to one's own tenets and beliefs. The more I researched the Baptists, the more grateful and thankful I was that God had given to us the rich heritage of correct biblical interpretation, of sound biblical exegesis, of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. What a wonderful foundation we have in Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, and Sola Gratia!

- 19 -
BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hays, Brooks and Steely, John E. The Baptist Way of Life. Mercer University Press, 1981
- Fickett, Harold L. A Layman's Guide to Baptist Beliefs. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House. 1965
- Maring, Norman H. American Baptist - Whence and Whither. Valley Forge, Pa.: The Judson Press, 1968
- Mayer, F. E. The Religious Bodies of America. St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1961
- Smith, Elliott. The Advance of Baptist Associations Across America. Nashville, Tennessee: Boradman Press, 1979
- Sweet, Will Warren. Religion on the American Frontier - The Baptists. Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1931
- Torbet, Robert G. A History of the Baptists. Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press. 1973

PERIODICAL

- Vallesky, David "Evangelical Lutheranism and Today's Evangelicals and Fundamentalists" WLQ vol. 80, #3, 1983

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY
Library
6633 W. WARTBURG CIRCLE
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD
DATE: 10/10/54
SUBJECT: [Illegible]

EFR